

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O 191020Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6897

C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0835

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MT

SUBJ: MINTOFF LETTER TO THE SECRETARY

REF: (A) STATE 1795092; (B) VALLETTA 0817

1. WE APPRECIATE RECEIVING THE TEXT OF MINTOFF'S LETTER CONTAINED IN REFTEL (A) AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON IT. IN GENERAL , IT IS ALONG THE LINED SKETCHED FOR ME BY ATTORNEY GENERAL MZZI (REFTEL B), WHO UNDOUBTEDLY HAD A LARGE ROLE IN ITS DRAFTING. IN MAKING THE COMMENTS WHICH FOLLOW, WE ARE DOING SO WITHOUT HAVING THE "DRAFT AGREEMENT" ENCLOSED WITH MINTOFF'S LETTER.

2. THE LETTER, WHICH IS AT ONCE A BLACKMAIL THREAT AND A PLEA FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING OF MALTA'S ECONOMIC STRAITS WHEN THE BRITISH LEAVE IN 1979, BETRAYS MINTOFF'S GROWING ANXIETY AS THE LECTION NEARS. HE HAS REASON TO BE WORRIED, FOR THE PRO-WESTERN NATIONALIST OPPOSITION APPEARS TO BE GAINING IN STRENGHT AT HIS EXPENSE WITH EVERY PASSING DAY. THE ELECTION IS LIKELY TO BE CLOSE, AND WE CONTINUE TO SEE NO REASPOIN WHY WE SHOULD RESPOND TO HIS LETTER IN SUCH A WAY AS TO HELP MINTOFF. THE SECRETARY HAS SAID PUBLICLY THAT WE WOULD CONSIDER IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS THE VOTING PATTERNS OF COUNTRIES ON ISSUES WHICH ARE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO US. MINTOFF HEADS THE ONLY GOVERNMENT IN WESTERN EUROPE WHICH VOTED AGAINST US IN THE UNGA ON EVERY ONE

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OF THE TWENTY-FIVE ISSUES OF GREATEST IMPORTANCE TO US.

NOR IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE WHATEVER TO SUPPOSE THAT EVEN IF WE DID HELP MINTOFF, THAT HE WOULD RETURN THE FAVOR IN ANY WAY.

3. WE RECOGNIZE THAT A GENUINELY NEUTRAL MALTA AFTER 1979, PERHAPS "GUARANTEED" AND ASSISTED BY OTHER COUNTRIES, IS ONE OF SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES WORTHY OF DISCUSSION IN NATO AND OTHER FORA AFTER THE ELECTIONS ARE OUT OF THE WAY. AT THE SAME TIME, WE BELIEVE MINTOFF'S IDEA OF ARRANGING THIS BETWEEN NOW AND THE ELECTION IS WILDLY IMPRACTICAL. SINCE HE IS NO FOOL, HE MUST KNOW THIS AS WELL. HIS REAL DESIRE MUST THEREFORE BE TO BE ABLE TO TELL THE ELECTORATE THAT HE HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SEVERAL WESTERN LEADERS (NOW INCLUDING THE SECRETARY) AND THAT HE HAS RECEIVED ASSURANCES, HOWEVER VAGUE, OF SYMPATHETIC CONSIDERATION OF HIS PLAN BY THE WESTERN COUNTRIES.

4. WE REGARD THE THREAT OF MINTOFF'S ANNOUNCING A MUTUAL DEFENSE PACT WITH LIBYA DURING THE ELECTION AS PURE BLUFF. NOT ONLY WOULD IT BE A CASE OF THE FOX GUARDING THE CHICKEN COOP, BUT THE LIBYAN/MALTESE RELATIONSHIP IS LARGELY A PERSONAL QADHAFI/MINTOFF TIE, AND THE MALTESE PEOPLE KNOW IT. LIBYANS IN GENERAL ARE DISLIKED AND REGARDED WITH CONDESCENSION BY THE MALTESE, AND THE FANATICAL COL. QADHAFI IS BOTH FEARED AND DISTRUSTED HERE. MINTOFF'S PLAYING OF THE LIBYAN CARD IN THE ELECTIONS WOULD IN ALL PROBABILITY RESULT IN A NATIONALIST VICTORY. AGAIN, MINTOFF KNOWS THIS, AND WE REGARD THIS THREAT AS STILL ANOTHER 1971 VINTAGE ATTEMPT TO BLACKMAIL THE WEST INTO GIVING HIM WHAT HE WANTS. WE BELIEVE HIS BLUFF SHOULD BE CALLED.

5. MINTOFF SEEMS TO THINK THAT IF HIS "DRAFT AGREEMENT" RECEIVES OUR SUPPORT OR ACQUIESCENCE, THE FRENCH AND THE GERMANS WOULD THEN JOIN THE ITALIANS IN THE WELCOMING EMBRACE OF MINTOFF AND QADHAFI. WE DOUBT THIS. IF MINTOFF AND QADHAFI CONSTITUTE THE ODD COUPLE, THE ADDITION OF THESE THREE EUROPEAN STATES WOULD SURELY TURN THE GROUP INTO AN EVEN ODDER QUINTET, AND WE HAVE

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DIFFICULTY IN ENVISAGING SUCH A SCENARIO. STRANGE BEDFELLOWS INDEED, PARTICULARLY AT A TIME WHEN QADHAFI IS COMING UNDER HEAVY FIRE FROM OTHER ARAB STATES. WE SUSPECT THAT MINTOFF MAY HAVE MISTAKEN POLITE HEARINGS IN BONN AND PARIS FOR ACQUIESCENCE IN HIS GRAND DESIGN. IN ANY CASE, DESPITE OUR ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE WEST, MINTOFF CAN HARDLY EXPECT US TO SPEAK FOR THE THREE EUROPEAN STATES. WHAT HE REALLY WANTS MUST BE

A "NO OBJECTION" ON OUR PART. BUT WE DO NOT BELIEVE WE SHOULD GIVE IT TO HIM--CERTAINLY NOT BEFORE THE ELECTION.

6. "MUTUAL DEFENSE" (AGAINST WHOM, WE MIGHT LEGITIMATELY ASK) IS IN FACT NOT WHAT MINTOFF NEEDS. IT IS ECONOMIC VIABILITY AND A REPLACEMENT FOR THE SOME \$80 MILLION ANNUALLY WHICH MALTA WILL LOSE WHEN THE BRITISH LEAVE IN 1979. AS HE NOTE IN PARA 3 OF HIS LETTER, HE HAS IN FACT WORKED DILIGENTLY IF NOT WISELY AT CHANGING THE "FORTRESS ECONOMY" INTO ONE BASED ON OTHER FACTORS. BUT HE HAS BEEN FAR FROM SUCCESSFUL. MALTA, WHETHER NATIONALIST OR LABOR, WILL DESPERATELY NEED OUTSIDE HELP AND ASSISTANCE AFTER 1979 IF ITS PRESENT STANDARD OF LIVING IS TO BE MAINTAINED. MINTOFF GIVES NOT INDICATION THAT MALTA IS PREPARED TO GIVE ANYTHING IN RETURN FOR SUCH ASSISTANCE, ALTHOUGH DENIAL OF ACCESS TO "THE OTHER SIDE" (AS WELL AS US) IS IMPLIED. IN SHORT, HE REALLY WANTS SOMETHING FOR NOTHING. (THE DEPARTMENT WILL NOTE THAT MINTOFF APPARENTLY CONTINUES TO REGARD THE US NOT AS A PROTECTOR AND FACTOR FOR STABILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, BUT AS ONE OF THE "CONTENDER FOR SUPREMACY" "PARA 7).)

7. IN FORMULATING THE RESPONSE TO MINTOFF, THE DEPARTMENT MAY THEREFORE WISH TO CONSIDER: (A) AVOIDING GIVING MINTOFF ANYTHING WHICH HE COULD "REVEAL" TO THE ELECTORATE TO HIS ADVANTAGE; (B) ACKNOWLEDGING OUR AWARENESS OF MALTA'S POST-1979 PROBLEM AND OUR WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER IT ALONG WITH OUR ALLIES--BUT ONLY AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME AFTER THE ELECTIONS ARE OUT OF THE WAY; AND (C) EMPHASIZING OUR INABILITY IN ANY CASE TO DO THIS IN THE SHORT TIME BETWEEN NOW AND THE ELECTIONS
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IN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

8. WE BELIEVE THAT THE BRITISH, WHO HAVE A LARGE STAKE HERE AND, AFTER ALL, WILL STILL BE IN MALTA WITH A MILITARY PRESENCE FOR ALMOST ANOTHER THREE YEARS, SHARE OUR VIEW THAT THE "URGENCY" MINTOFF CONSTANTLY STRESSES IS PURELY OF HIS OWN MAKING AND DESIGNED SOLELY TO ENHANCE LABOR'S CHANCES OF REELECTION. WE CONTINUE TO SEE NO REASON TO PLAY MINTOFF'S GAME AND ADHERE TO A TIME TABLE OF HIS OWN MAKING. SMITH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, ELECTION FORECASTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, DIPLOMATIC NOTES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976VALLET00835
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760277-0070
From: VALLETTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760743/aaaabllo.tel
Line Count: 164
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 VALLETTA 817
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 APR 2004 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <19 AUG 2004 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MINTOFF LETTER TO THE SECRETARY
TAGS: PFOR, MT, US, (MINTOFF, DOMINIC)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006